

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47), the ranking female member on the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), today issued the following statement in support of her amendment to the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act. If adopted, Rep. Sanchez's amendment would have given military commanders the option of assigning qualified female soldiers to combat positions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other war zones. Instead, HASC Chairman Ike Skelton offered a perfecting amendment to Rep. Sanchez's provision that directs the Secretary of Defense to further study women's expanding role in the military:

"Mr. Chairman, today I am offering an amendment to direct the Secretary of Defense to give the Secretaries of the various military services the authorization to assign members of the armed services to units based on the needs of the unit, regardless of gender. This language will provide commanders the flexibility to assign members of the armed services based on the needs of the unit as long as the soldier is able to meet the required eligibilities and perform the required duties of the unit.

"Current restrictions tie a commander's hands while they are in theatre from assigning women to certain units for the sole reason of being a woman. However, as we all know, commanders have the best situational awareness in terms of what is occurring on the battleground. They know what their mission is and what personnel and resources they need in order to accomplish the ultimate mission.

"All of us know that women service members may not be assigned to combat units but they are certainly attached to units in order to support combat operations on a daily basis. Frankly, women are engaging in combat every day. Over 600 women have been wounded in combat and over 120 have been killed in the Afghanistan and Iraq theaters. Whether they are attached or assigned, they are expected to perform in combat situations that put them in harm's way.

"As we all know, the nature of today's wars are very different, there are no definitive frontlines. Women are accompanying men and facing the same enemy fire the men are facing. Culturally, male soldiers cannot search females in the community, so commanders are attaching women to these units and women are expected to do the job.

"In many situations female soldiers are encountering situations they are not prepared for because they were not provided with the same type and amount of training as men who are in

the same units. And I believe this is not only a threat to our female soldiers but the safety of their fellow soldiers because they will not be able to adequately support the unit.

"A number of women have also been the recipients of the combat action badge. The Combat Action Badge is awarded to recognize soldiers who personally engage the enemy, or are engaged by the enemy during combat operations.

"Commanders should not have to worry about who they can or cannot assign to a unit, they should have the authority to place whomever they want in a unit as long as they are willing and capable of accomplishing the mission, regardless of gender. This language gives them the choice to assign freely without being worried about violating a restriction.

"In a March 2010 report, DOD stated, 'Regardless of gender, service members perform duties outside their designated military occupations on a regular basis, whether deployed or at their home station. In the course of these duties, female service members are subject to the same hazards of utilization policies as their male counterparts and may be directly exposed to the hazards of armed conflict.'

"One commander was quoted in a New York Times opinion piece saying, 'You do your mission based on the equipment you have and the organization of soldiers you have. It's not like ok we just got attacked, I want all the female soldiers to go sit in the ditch. They're not special, they're soldiers and they are expected by their leaders to perform as soldiers.' When commanders need to send a soldier to the frontlines, they are not looking for a man, but for a soldier – one who is willing to fight regardless of their gender.

"I was also compelled to offer this amendment because despite their valiant service in combat, women are not receiving the recognition they deserve. Combat experience is essential to a service member's military career. And although women are gaining this experience it is not being put in their records because, again, the current restrictions do not allow it. Women are limited in their ability to enhance their careers because of that.

"I believe it is a disservice to our commanders and our female soldier to refuse to allow them to serve in certain units. Let me close with a few statistics:

- To date, over 240,000 female service member have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Over 27,900 female service members are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- An estimated 68 female service members have been killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- And over 680 female service members have been wounded in action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I understand that the Chairman has a substitute amendment to my amendment. Although I support the Chairman's substitute amendment, I strongly believe that the Department's current assignment policy remains irrelevant in today's nature of warfare.

"And I hope the Chairman along with the Department will work with me to make our military a gender-neutral environment and give our female servicemembers the recognition they deserve. It is essential that we provide the women in our armed services every opportunity to serve this country to their fullest capability."